Paul A. Laurens, who at that time was paying court to Mme Dickemare, spent all his evenings at the Casino of Biskra. I spent all of mine in a low and ill-lighted little shop that in the daytime did a meager business in henna and where in the evening Bachir, Mohammed, Larbi, Bachir's brother, and a few other friends of theirs gathered together! They used to play the three-card trick or checkers. Bachir would prepare the coffee. The pipette of kief would go around from mouth to mouth. I used to amuse Athman by calling this gloomy spot "the little casino." Yes, really, I spent every evening there. What did I do? I wonder today. I neither smoked nor played with the others and was not exactly in love with any one of them —no, but rather with that very atmosphere, with that darkness, with that silence, with their company, which I could not do without. Each one of them was, if not very handsome, at least full of grace and lithe; elsewhere I have spoken of them. I am well aware that today, more restless, alas, further itdvanced in debauch, I could not remain the observer that I then was. Not a single evening of the two months that I went there did I fix my desires on one of them. This is also what allowed me to prolong my pleasure endlessly, Time passed; never since have I so completely lost the sense of time, both of age and of the hour. The kief would have added nothing to this.

1

December

Last night went with Gheon to hear Carissimfs *Jephthdh* (Salle Gaveau). With great art Mme Raunay sings two cantatas by Schutz. The overture to the *Marriage of Figaro;* the Chevillard Orchestra gives too great a volume of sound to that airy and passionate music. Of all musicians Mozart is the one from whom our *epoch* has taken us farthest away: he speaks only in a whisper, and the public has ceased to hear

anything but shouts.

The pleasure I enjoy and the education I get from these evening excursions never make up for my fatigue. I was able to go to sleep afterward only with the help of chloral.

Leaving the dentist's, went into the shop of a little naturalist I didn't yet know (almost opposite Saint-Germain-des-Pr6s). Bought (irresistibly) a few wonderful shells,

2

December

Bad night; I wake up with grippe. Delight at the thought of having to spend a fortnight in the house.

I finish the book by Photiad&s (on Meredith). His considerations on the art o£ Meredith rather tire my attention; I should have preferred him to limit himself to speaking of the life and career.